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CROSSTOWN CLASSIC

AN INSIDER'S GUIDE TO CHICAGO BASEBALL WITH DePAUL ALUMNI

BY KELSEY SCHAGEMANN

When the Chicago Cubs won the World Series last year for the first time since 1908, DePaul alumni were part of the celebration. They rode in trolleys during the parade, clutched the trophy at the party and toasted each other with champagne. This exclusive access wasn't the result of a lottery or golden ticket—rather, it was the outcome of their dedicated behind-the-scenes efforts to ensure the Cubs operation runs smoothly.

By our count, there are at least a dozen alumni employed by the Cubs, working in areas as diverse as technology, safety and security, ticket sales, accounting and human resources. Their degrees run the gamut from communication and business to English, computer science and more. DePaul alumni can also be found in the upper ranks of the White Sox organization, overseeing finance, sales and marketing, and legal affairs.

What's it like to work for a Major League Baseball (MLB) team? Our alumni opened up about family loyalty, employee perks, getting into the industry and, of course, witnessing history. We think they hit it out of the park.



Photo by DePaul University/Jeff Carrion

Cubs fans filled the streets to celebrate their 2016 World Series Champions.



YOU HAD TO BE THERE

From dealing with know-it-all fans to quirks of the industry to encounters with players, alumni share the scoop on some of the unique aspects of their chosen professions.



“When I was general counsel for a machine tool company, I wasn’t the center of discussion at cocktail parties. Now everyone knows my employer, and sometimes people want to pass along their knowledge on how to fix the team’s performance.”

John Corvino (MST ’82, JD ’85)
General counsel, White Sox



“Last year, we had a front office field day, where we had the opportunity to spend an afternoon taking batting practice, shagging fly balls and just running around on the grass. It was a blast.”

Alexa Vaicaitis (BUS ’08)
Senior account executive, premium sales, White Sox



ALL IN THE FAMILY

For some Cubs and Sox employees, baseball is in their blood. “My dad had a connection to great seats and would pull me out of school at least once a year so we could drive down,” recalls **Dino Stiris (CMN ’05)**, manager of risk management for the Cubs. “Looking at it now that I’m older, the Cubs and baseball played a big role in the connection that I have with my dad.” Stiris’ dad wasn’t the only parent encouraging his child to play hooky. “One of my fondest childhood memories is of my dad sneaking me out of ballet class early to go to a Sox game,” says **Alexa Vaicaitis (BUS ’08)**, senior account executive, premium sales, for the White Sox. “And I could always count on my mom to call me in ‘sick’ on opening day.”

Then there’s the epic “Ferris Bueller”-esque escapade of **Joel Guth’s (CDM ’14, MS ’15)** father. When he was in high school in 1985, Guth’s father scored \$10 tickets for a weekday Cubs game. “As they were walking toward the ballpark, my father and grandfather were approached by Yosh Kawano, the clubhouse manager at the time,” recounts Guth, a systems engineer for the Cubs. “He asked my dad if he would like to be the batboy for the day, and after some confusion about whether or not it was a joke, my father agreed.” They put him in a full uniform, paid him \$10, gave him the game ball and asked if he could come back the next day. Alas, Guth’s father had a math test that he couldn’t miss. “The best part of it is that he would have gotten away with skipping school that day if he hadn’t ended up on the front page of the Freeport (Ill.) Journal Standard, resulting in a stern letter from his assistant principal,” Guth shares with a laugh.



**“I COULD ALWAYS COUNT
ON MY MOM TO CALL ME IN
‘SICK’ ON OPENING DAY.”**



Bill Waters (BUS ’83, MAC ’83), vice president of finance for the White Sox, who is currently in his 29th season with the team, attended his very first game at age six. “I also remember watching Sox games at my grandparents’, who lived three blocks away from the old Comiskey Park,” he says. “If a White Sox player hit a home run, I would dash outside to see the fireworks go off.” All these years later, Waters still can’t believe it when he walks into the ballpark each morning for work. “It’s honestly a dream come true.”

But what if you’re suiting up each day for your rival? That was initially a concern for **John Corvino (MST ’82, JD ’85)**, general counsel for the White Sox. “I was a Cubs fan all my life, and I still don’t root against the Cubs,” he admits. Corvino even mentioned this potential red flag to his now-boss, Jerry Reinsdorf, the owner of the White Sox, during the interview process. “He said, ‘As long as you can practice law, we will work on the rest,’” Corvino remembers. Turns out Reinsdorf was right. “I drank the Kool-Aid and am now 100 percent a Sox fan!”



WE ARE THE CHAMPIONS

**"IT'S A
FEELING
I WILL
NEVER
FORGET."**

Tom Dambra (CDM '13), software engineer for the Cubs, claims he lost a few years of his life watching game 7 of the 2016 World Series in Cleveland. "The whole front office sat together in suspense," he recalls. "It would be an understatement to say that being part of the Cubs' historic win was the most exciting experience I've had in my life so far."

The owners of the Cubs, the Ricketts family, chartered flights to Cleveland for the front office staff for the entire World Series run. "Not many people can say they saw every pitch, home and away, during the 2016 World Series," Dino Stiris notes. "I really felt like a player during those trips—it was the experience of a lifetime." The Ricketts' generosity extended to a "plus one" for each staffer, which meant Stiris was able to bring his 16-year-old nephew to the post-parade celebrations. "That was an amazing moment," he says with a smile.

Annie Begalke (BUS '13), human resources specialist, echoes her colleagues, calling games 6 and 7 "the most heart-wrenching moments of my life." There were cheers, there were tears and the subsequent weeks were surreal. "From being in the parade to the rally, it was such a rewarding experience to be part of such a big celebration," she says.

If Bill Waters' experience is any indication, those memories won't fade over time. Waters was working for the White Sox when they won the World Series in 2005. "It's a feeling I will never forget," he asserts. "Many people have worked here a long time, and to celebrate a World Series victory with those I had worked next to for many years was extra special."



Photo by ©G. N. Lowrance/Getty Images

The White Sox celebrate clinching the World Series in 2005.



“On a stressful day, I will often-times walk over to the ballpark and just sit in the stands. Something about being in an empty Wrigley Field while the sun is shining and just taking a few moments to myself really relaxes me. It helps me to recharge my batteries.”

Dino Stiris (CMN '05)

Manager, risk management, Cubs



“Working for an organization with such an incredible history is amazing. I’ll occasionally take a moment and view the items we have on display in our offices or the archives. I must remind myself when I see a hat or jersey that I’m looking at the real thing—like Ernie Banks’ uniform.”

Michael J. Papa (CDM '03, MS '15)

Assistant director, technology infrastructure, Cubs



“Opening day is essentially our Jan. 1, and people will often say they’ve been here for ‘X’ number of seasons versus stating how many years they have been with the organization.”

Annie Begalke (BUS '13)

Human resources specialist, Cubs



TRAITOROUS FACULTY

A peculiar little blurb in the Sept. 29, 1932, issue of The DePaulia newspaper exposed excessive support for the New York Yankees among DePaul faculty. “After much investigation, the stooges found the reason why so many members of the faculty are cheering for the Yankees,” College of Law student Johnny Mallon stated in his “After the Ball” column. “This may seem funny to you, since the Cubs are neighbors to the school, but the fact is that Joe McCarthy, shrewd manager of the Yanks, is a product of the Vincentian Order, having attended Niagara University.” Goodbye hometown pride, hello Vincentian loyalty.

“JOE MCCARTHY,
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VINCENTIAN ORDER.”



SO YOU WANNA WORK FOR THE MLB

Breaking into the MLB isn’t as difficult as pitching a 100-mph fastball, but it’s also not as easy as putting on your team colors and declaring your undying devotion. “The Cubs didn’t hire me because I was a fan,” Dino Stiris points out. “They hired me because they felt I could do the job.”

Marisol Widmayer (SNL '05), coordinator of Total Rewards and HR operations for the Cubs, tells interested applicants to look out for internships, as well as seasonal and part-time positions, all of which can be a great way to get your foot in the door. That worked for Stiris, who left his career as a sports reporter to become an intern in the media relations department, as well as current full-time employees Joel Guth, who started as a part-time service desk technician while pursuing his undergraduate degree at DePaul, and Annie Begalke, who accepted a part-time position during her senior year.

Other types of internships and jobs helped prepare DePaul alumni for the ups and downs of working in professional sports. Before she joined the Cubs, Begalke sold hot dogs and interned for the Kane County Cougars, a Minor League Baseball team based in Geneva, Ill. **Brooks Boyer (MBA '01)**, senior vice president of sales and marketing for the White Sox, spent a decade with the Chicago Bulls before joining the Sox. His colleague Bill Waters put in six years at Ernst & Whinney (now Ernst & Young), where the Sox were among his clients. “Most professional sports teams have the luxury of finding someone with sports experience, so being in that group of applicants is an advantage,” he explains.



SECRETS OF WRIGLEY FIELD

Robert Daniels (LAS '14, MA '17)

knows Wrigley Field inside and out. As a tour guide for the past three seasons, Daniels has led hundreds of people through the second-oldest ballpark in the major leagues. Whether fans hail from Chicago, Chattanooga or Copenhagen, they expect to be wowed. “They’ve waited all these years for this one moment,” Daniels says. Sounds a bit like a certain team we know.

If you can’t make the pilgrimage in person, you can still enjoy these tour-guide-certified stories.

WHAT’S IN A NAME?

“The Cubs have gone by several different names,” Daniels notes. “They’ve been the Orphans, the Colts and the Chicago White Stockings—so in a way, they were the White ‘Sox’ before the White Sox.” In 1902, the team was stocked with several young and relatively inexperienced players, causing a local newspaper to refer to them as the Cubs. Over time, the nickname stuck, and it became the official team name in 1907.

WHO’S THAT MAN?

“Before [Cubs pitcher] Jake Arrieta was a household name, he was waiting to get into the ballpark, and we had a tour group nearby,” Daniels recalls. “The funny thing is that he was standing under a 10-foot-tall poster of himself. I could see the tour group look up at the poster, then down at him, then up at the poster, trying to figure out if it was him. Then someone in the concourse yelled his name, and the tour group realized, ‘It is Jake Arrieta!’ He signed autographs for the tour group for who knows how long after that, but he was really nice about it.”

DID GRANDMA PLAY HERE?

Former players and family members of former players sometimes show up for a stroll down memory lane. “You know the movie ‘A League of Their Own’? Well, we’ve had a couple of descendants of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League on the tour because they wanted to see where grandma played,” Daniels says. As depicted in the film, the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League held tryouts at Wrigley Field in 1943. Later that year, the ballpark hosted the league’s All-Star Game, and a four-team doubleheader played at Wrigley in 1944.

WAS IT A HOME RUN?

Before the current brick bleachers were built in 1937, fans sometimes sat on the outfield grass behind a rope held taut by ushers. If a ball

was hit into the crowd, it was ruled a double. “Legend has it that when the Cubs were at bat, the rope would sometimes move up a few feet,” Daniels says. This was because the fans often surged forward in their eagerness, forcing the ushers to take a few steps forward as well. Of course, in so doing, the crowd also increased the likelihood of a ball going into the crowd for a double. Not surprisingly, the crowd supposedly moved back when the opposing team was at bat.

Sign up for a tour of Wrigley Field at www.cubs.com/tours. Pro tip: Visit on a nongame day if you want to see the press box, the Cubs’ dugout and the visitors’ clubhouse—the same clubhouse frequented by Babe Ruth, Ted Williams, Lou Gehrig, Roberto Clemente and Jackie Robinson.





“I got mad when the Houston Astros tied up game 2 of the 2005 World Series and left my seat to go to the office because I was certain we were headed to extra innings. I did not see Scott Podsednik’s walk-off homer live. I saw it on the TV in my office! It worked out fine. I have since apologized to Pods for my lack of faith.”

Brooks Boyer (MBA ’01)
Senior vice president, sales and marketing, White Sox



“During my first year with the White Sox, I was put on a golf outing foursome with Bill Melton, who played for the Sox from 1968 to 1975. Melton was my sports hero when I was growing up, and when you meet someone whom you admired growing up, it tends to bring back those childhood feelings. On the second hole, I told Melton I couldn’t golf with him because he was my sports hero and I was simply too nervous. But Melton put me at ease, and we made it through the day. Now I have a signed Bill Melton uniform hanging in my office.”

Bill Waters (BUS ’83, MAC ’83)
Vice president of finance, White Sox



THE BUSINESS OF SPORTS

Sports are big business. According to an Oct. 10, 2016, article in Forbes, the North American sports market is on target to grow by \$11.8 billion from 2015 to 2020, topping out at \$75.7 billion. This upward curve is good news for the undergraduates and MBA students pursuing concentrations in sports management at the Driehaus College of Business and Kellstadt Graduate School of Business.

The 8-year-old program introduces students to the nuts and bolts of the sports industry, including how to achieve a career in the field. Courses cover topics such as sponsorship marketing, sales, journalism and media, management, and economics. Site visits and classroom speakers enhance the real-world component of the program. For example, during the winter intersession course “Behind the Scenes with Chicago Sports Organizations,” students tour 16 professional teams, sports agencies and athletic-focused companies, such as Gatorade, in five jam-packed days.

“Chicago is our classroom,” explains **Andy Clark (MBA ’87)**, director of DePaul’s sports management programs and the instructor for the “Behind the Scenes” course. “As a result, you name a Chicago team, and I can tell you alumni who work there.”

Many of these more recent alumni, such as **Diego Chahda (BUS ’12)**, premier account executive for the Cubs, are products of the sports management track. “My classes at DePaul taught me that you’re selling more than space,” he says. “You’re selling experience, and service is how you do that. So that’s my emphasis: serving our customers and making sure they’re more than satisfied with us.”

It’s not just the customers who are satisfied. Clark notes that employers often comment on the diligence of DePaul alumni and the attentiveness of visiting students, praising their hardworking nature, smart questions and passion for the field. “People are aware of our programs now,” Clark says. “And they like what they see.”



- Read about other sports management alumni working for the Cubs at depaulmagazine.com.
- Learn how being a student at DePaul is similar to working for a major league baseball team at depaulmagazine.com.